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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 004440

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: IRAQI LEADERS CONTINUE DISCUSSIONS OF MODERATE
FRONT

REF: A. BAGHDAD 4426

[B](#). BAGHDAD 4405

[C](#). BAGHDAD 4402

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (S) Summary: President Talabani, Prime Minister Maliki, and other Iraqi leaders met December 2 to continue discussing the formation of a moderate political front. They seemed to be moving toward the creation of an executive body representing the Kurds, IIP, SCIRI, and Dawa, perhaps as embodied in the Presidency Council, plus the Prime Minister. This body would serve to take key strategic decisions to guide the work of the moderate bloc in the Council of Representatives and the ministries. The group designated three members to come up with a more concrete plan on December 3 for presentation to the group December 4. While the Prime Minister seemed supportive of the idea, he did not indicate that he had discussed it within his party or circle.
End summary.

[1](#)2. (S) President Jalal Talabani hosted the group at his office complex. The other Iraqi principals attending were Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki; Vice Presidents Tarik al-Hashemi and Adel Abdel Mehdi; KRG President Masoud Barzani; Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih; and Council of Representatives member Rowsh Shaways (KDP). The Ambassador also attended.

Summaries of Trips Abroad

[1](#)3. (S) Talabani opened the meeting by giving a summary of his trip to Iran that followed closely the readout he had previously given the Ambassador (ref A). Maliki described his meeting with President Bush in Jordan as very positive, noting that the President had reiterated his commitment to Iraq's democratic process and to the accelerated training of Iraqi security forces and transfer of authority to them as appropriate. Both leaders had agreed, Maliki continued, that military force alone would not end the problems in Iraq: the political process was equally important. Maliki said that the two had discussed regional issues affecting Iraq's security, with the President assuring him that U.S. envoys were pressing Iraq's Arab neighbors to support Iraq and that he would support a regional conference if it would help Iraq's elected leaders in their efforts to overcome the crisis in Iraq. Al-Hashemi said that he had made his "last minute" visit to Jordan because King Abdullah wanted to meet with representatives of the "full spectrum" of Iraqi society. He said he had urged King Abdullah to tell President Bush that Sunnis want reform in Iraq without "diverting from democracy."

Progress on Building a Moderate Front

14. (S) Barzani then turned the conversation to a continued dialogue on building a moderate political front (ref C). He noted that the front should be composed of the two Kurdish parties, the IIP, SCIRI and Dawa, and any other "moderate and responsible forces." The front's program, he continued, should be based on confronting extremists who "do not want success." Noting with disapproval the Sadrists' decision to withdraw temporarily from the government (ref B), Barzani argued, "We should talk to Sadr and ask if he is with this killing and deterioration, and the same with Harith al-Dari." Security of Baghdad and reforming the army and police, Barzani continued, would be essential areas of focus for the front.

15. (S) Abdel Mehdi argued for the need for a new political institution to "activate the role of the government." He contended that the PCNS, although it was a legitimate institution, had not performed this role because it became too large. He described the CoR as currently "more of a place to make speeches than to legislate." He criticized the Sadrist temporary withdrawal as unacceptable, saying "we cannot have deputies threatening to withdraw when the Prime Minister meets with the president of another country" and asking rhetorically what it meant for a minister to withdraw without resigning. Abdel Mehdi proposed that a "state executive council" be established consisting of the Presidency Council (whose members also represent the PUK, IIP, and SCIRI) and Prime Minister Maliki (also representing Dawa) to be the "decision making hub" of this new moderate front and to provide guidance to the CoR, Council of Ministers, and PCNS.

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16. (S) Al-Hashemi reiterated IIP's support for a moderate front and urged that reforming the army and police be the key area of focus for the front. He offered the example of the Basrah police, who, he said, number 15,000, of whom only 2,000 - 3000 are qualified. Too many officers, he argued, were committed to militias or "certain religious figures." Talabani noted that all present were in agreement about the need to bring together moderate forces to support the Prime Minister and focus on the security situation. The group also needed to "work on its political speech," he continued, so that it spoke with one voice. Barham Salih reiterated the need for a united message in working with neighboring countries and in confronting the Sadrists and Sunni oppositionists.

17. (S) Maliki said that it was necessary to expand the political base of people willing to work in the interests of the government rather than their own interests. He noted that the appointment of ministers on the basis of political affiliation constituted a political challenge, as did the divided loyalties of some police and army officers. Maliki pointed to actions in Samawah, where he had ordered the arrest of five officers involved in "improper activities," as an example of his determination to reform the security services, but he noted that the process could not be done overnight. He noted that changing the cabinet was "a necessity" and asked for the support of the leaders present, later specifically requesting that they form a committee to submit their suggestions for ministerial changes to him. Maliki stated that he was leaning to a large-scale shake-up and noted that he would not necessarily pick a new minister from the same party as the outgoing minister. He said that he had told the Sadrists that "anyone who does not sit in the Council of Ministers does not have the right to sign papers in their ministry."

18. (S) The leaders then debated the shape of a new institutional body that would act as the steering committee

for the moderate political bloc. While they seemed to agree that the body would be small and operate via consensus and consultation, they did not reach agreement on the exact composition. Al-Hashemi said that his prior understanding was that it would consist of a Kurdish, IIP, and SCIRI representative, and that Abdel Mehdi's proposal was different. Barham Salih noted that Iraqiyya and other moderate forces might also need to be included. Al-Hashemi asked the Prime Minister, who had been absent for part of the conversation, if he supported the idea of an executive committee of moderate forces. The Prime Minister said he believed such a mechanism could work but that he would need to study the exact plan. He noted that the process of building this institution and developing a plan of action would have to be done gradually in order to achieve success, and he also urged that the process be kept private at this point. The meeting ended with a decision that Abdel Mehdi, al-Hashemi, and Shaways would meet December 3 to draft a plan for the new institutional body, which they would present to the larger group December 4. Barzani urged speed, noting in good humor that he wanted to get back to Kurdistan.

19. (S) One striking feature of the meeting was the universal condemnation of the Sadrists' publicly-touted "temporary withdrawal" from the government. Maliki, al-Hashemi, Talabani, Barzani, Abdul Mehdi, and Salih each brought the issue up at various points in the conversation. An opportunity clearly exists for isolating the Sadrists politically as this moderate front is created.
Khalilzad